



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20591

CY 7055

A70-55

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

October 29, 1970

Honorable John H. Shaffer
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D. C. 20590

Dear Mr. Shaffer:

A public hearing was held in San Juan, P. R., on July 7, 1970, in conjunction with the Overseas National Airways DC-9, (ALM Flight 980), ditching near St. Croix on May 2, 1970. At the hearing, the flight captain testified that his public address system microphone was inoperative and therefore he could not use the system to give the passengers a "brace for impact" warning prior to striking the water. Instead, he said, he turned the seatbelt sign on and off as an alternate means of alerting the passengers and cabin crew for impact. This proved to be ineffective as this alternate signal was not known to be a "brace for impact signal" by either the cabin crew or passengers. The surviving passengers report receiving no warning of impact. Twenty-three persons lost their lives in this accident, including a stewardess who was reported to be standing in the aisle assisting passengers at the time of impact. The Board believes there would have been fewer lives lost if the passengers and cabin attendants had received adequate warning in time to strap themselves into their seats and prepare for the impact.

Federal Air Regulations Section 121.571 and 121.572 require on all flights the oral briefing of passengers concerning, among other things, the location and operation of emergency equipment and emergency exits. It is difficult to see how such an oral briefing can be adequately given in large present-day aircraft without the aid of a properly functioning public address system.

Although the public address system appears to be a necessity in providing the required passenger briefing, it is not a required item on the ONA DC-9 minimum equipment list (MEL). The Board is not aware of any air carrier aircraft in which the public address system is an

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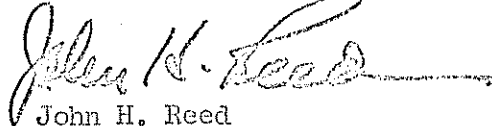
item of required minimum equipment. Under these conditions, a passenger-carrying aircraft can be dispatched without adequate means of providing the routine emergency information to the passengers. In addition, with an inoperative system, important instructive messages in time of emergency can be relayed only with difficulty.

The Board, therefore, recommends that:

The Federal Aviation Administration take the necessary steps to insure that no flight now requiring the briefing of passengers regarding emergency procedures be dispatched without an operable public address system. The system should be functioning so that the flight deck crew can speak to the passengers and a cabin attendant can speak to the passengers from at least one cabin station.

In accordance with established procedures, this letter will be placed in our public docket at the end of the five working-day period commencing the day after the date of this letter. It is understood, therefore, that there will be no public dissemination of this letter until that time.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John H. Reed", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John H. Reed
Chairman